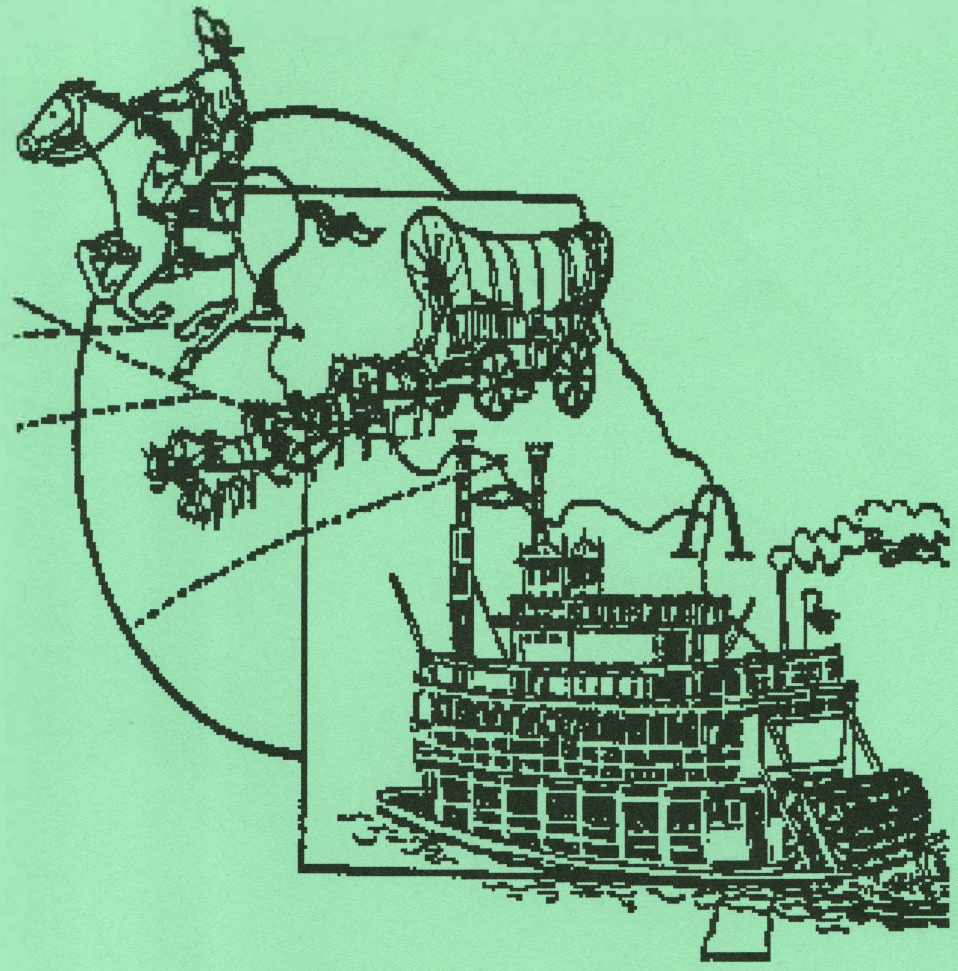

Toward The Setting Sun

2nd Series, Vol. 12, No. 2 Spring 2014

TOWARD THE SETTING SUN

The Historical Journal of the Missouri Conference
The United Methodist Church

Second Series

Volume 12, Number 2 Spring, 2014

Table Of Contents

From the Editor 1

A Half-Century of Arcadia Assembly 3

J.C. Montgomery, Sr.

What I Learned From the Old-Time Religion 15

John O. Gooch

FROM THE EDITOR

Many youth and adults in the old St. Louis Conference – and other parts of the Methodist Church in Missouri – have fond memories of the Arcadia Assembly: "Epworth Among the Hills." Your editor had three summers of rich experiences at senior high youth camps at Arcadia back in the 1950s. We had great leadership from the clergy of the conference. I give thanks for all that I learned from people like Marvin Fortel, Val Strader, Ted Matkin, Howard Hardeman. Lay leadership was also important, from conference directors of youth like Gloria Schlapbach and Barbara Eskew, and others like Jane Howard. We grew in faith in those weeks at Arcadia, along with making new friends and building the conference youth connections.

United Methodist Men and their predecessors also had rich experiences during their retreats at Arcadia. Bible studies, worship, fellowship, work projects, not only enriched the lives of laymen but helped keep Arcadia a viable institution for years. The article by J.C. Montgomery gives us glimpses of some of those years, from an institutional perspective. I'd like to have another article giving some of the stories about life-changing experiences (or just fun) from youth and others. The editorial note following Dr. Montgomery's article suggests how you could share your story with the readers of *Toward the Setting Sun.*

As I was finishing up this issue, it hit me that the J.C. Montgomery who wrote the Arcadia article (reprinted from the Conference Journal) was the same district superintendent who taught me an important lesson about connectionalism that I mentioned in "What I Learned From the Old-Time Religion." And many of the leaders at Arcadia youth camps were also among those who practiced the old-time religion, as I remember it. Which suggests to me that there are connections in the church that go beyond the table of organization and make us what a truly connectional church is.

Exciting times are ahead. 2016 is the Bicentennial of the organization of the Missouri Conference and plans are underway for celebrating that. In 2018, the United Methodist Historical Society will be meeting in our conference, probably in St. Louis. We are beginning to think about plans for that event.

We continue to look for new writers and new ideas for articles for this journal. We will have a special issue on the bicentennial in the spring of 2016. We're also

researching the 1970 General Conference, which was held in St. Louis. If you are interested in writing, but don't know how to find a topic, OR if you have a topic, but aren't sure how to go about writing it, I'll be glad to help you get started. You can reach me by email at jogooch@aol.com. If you are interested in history and would like to help do research, that would also be welcome. Contact me at the same email address and we'll figure out how you can help.

As always, share this copy of the Journal with your friends and invite them to become subscribers.

John O. Gooch, Editor

HALF-CENTURY OF ARCADIA ASSEMBLY "EPWORTH AMONG THE HILLS," 1909-1959

J. C. Montgomery[1]

The Sixty-Second Session of the St. Louis Annual Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was held in Fredericktown Church, Sept. 15-20, 1900; Bishop Warren A. Candler, presiding, Marvin T. Haw, Secretary.

I think that only four of the preachers in full connection that year are yet alive. They are Revs. W. J. Velvick, Allen D. Tankin, H. E. Ryan, D. R. Davis, retired members of our Conference. Of the thirty-one laymen members, not one is yet alive. There had been 4,298 members added to the church during the year, a gross gain of just over sixteen per cent – last year our gain was just less than eight per cent. That year it required 12.4 Methodists to win one on profession of faith – last year it required eleven more Methodists to do the same work. The Annual Conference put itself into good history by adopting a resolution submitted by a special committee raised to consider "the Arcadia proposition." The report said prophetically, "It appears feasible, and promises much to the church." Propositions from other communities, might, however, be considered. The report concluded with these words: "We recommend a program for the coming season, if conditions favor such action, provided that such action does not involve the conference in any financial obligation." The Epworth League Board report was packed with enthusiasm:

"We have heard with pleasure of the proposed Epworth Among the Hills at Arcadia, Missouri. For a long time the young people of our conference have been in need of just such a gathering place, and of the inspiration and uplift that is sure to come to the annual meetings which are made possible by this forward step. Believing this to be a God-given opportunity, we accept our part of the obligation and responsibility, and pledge ourselves to our part to make it a success. Therefore be it resolved: first, that we express our gratitude to the people of Arcadia for the kindly and helpful interest they have shown in the movement; and, second, that we undertake and plan to hold an Epworth League Encampment next summer." The gratitude of the Leaguers to Arcadia-Ironton people was because Methodist laymen of the valley, together with two

---

[1] St. Louis Annual Conference Journal, MC 1959 (May 14-18 in Sikeston), pp. 159-66.

presiding elders, had already purchased or at least taken an option on, two hundred and fifty acres including what is now within the boundaries of Arcadia Assembly, holding the same for the pleasure and purpose of the church.

Memories of camp-meetings were still fresh and pleasant in hearts of many of our older brethren, although not one of the famous camp-meetings within the conference borders had continued operation to that time. And many Methodists felt that an Assembly ground would preserve that grand tradition; and actually, during the earliest years more than one summer program at Arcadia was spoken of as a Camp Meeting. Our Methodist young people had been attending Epworth League assemblies at Pirtle Springs, a commercial resort which they could reserve for their use. There was the birth of the vacation idea, and the popularity of the Arcadia area was well known. Our fathers thought of vacation combined with spiritual renewal, to find in "thick and shadowed forests the pathways of His purpose." And what could be more wonderful that Arcadia Valley, with the surrounding ramparts, hills whose shoulders were neighbors to the stars?

But, like the Messiah, Methodism had a Baptist forerunner. Yea, the Baptists were making much of their "Arcadia Heights". One of their preachers came to the Fredericktown Conference and showed us "magic lantern" slide pictures of their Assembly, including one of a baptism by immersion. Surely we could do as much and as well as the Baptists! Thanks to the Baptists for their help by provoking us to good works! (We abide, even though their Assembly faded out long years ago.)

II 1909-1918

The Conference Journal of 1910 gives us an Epworth League report: "We are gratified to learn of the progress and assured success of Epworth Among the Hills. Our people, and especially the Epworth Leagues are urged to by lots". An item of income was $81.50 for tent privileges. The Arcadia pastor and the presiding elder of the Farmington District are named a board of control. First building projects are listed: a tabernacle, roadways, and waterworks. Arcadia Assembly was on its way, owning a nice parcel of land quaintly described as beginning at a pin oak stump. There are trustees: Messrs. I. G. Whitworth, Edward R. Meyer, Louis Miller, Arthur Huff, R. D. Lewis,

and Rev. W. B. Haynes, Presiding Elder of the Farmington District, and Rev. R. L. Russell, Presiding Elder of the Charleston District.

In 1911 the tabernacle is built, and the Epworth League adopts a constitution for its "Encampment Association." Rental income from tents and cots moves up to $259, and this in 1912 increases to $588, indicating a substantial growth in attendance. The dining hall is provided at the cost of a little more than $1,000. A Sunday School Institute is conducted, and conference boards are holding summer meetings and making financial contributions. The Epworth League Board says significantly that it has no special authority over the grounds at Arcadia.

The 1913 report values the Assembly property at $15,800 with a debt of $7,400. Fifty $100 lots have been sold. It is noteworthy that $620 was spent for lecturers and preachers, indicating that top-talent was brought to Arcadia. But in 1914 the amount given in Honoraria was $742, a considerable portion of the total expense of $4,163. The Epworth League Board says its assembly was a success and well attended, praising Arcadia as "unsurpassed for beauty, second to none for recreation of body and diversion of mind, and a program equal to the best." The Annual Conference asked the churches for ten cents per member for the Assembly support. And in 1915 the Epworth League declared they would erect a suitable building.

The Annual Conference granted support in 1916 by an assessment of $2,500. In 1917 we are told "The building of cottages is uphill work," but the report continues by saying "the program was a fairly good one considering the unsettled conditions" – this last a reference to World War I.

The 1918 report takes a backward look to observe, "During the quadrennium have built several cottages." However, there are 25 family size tents and 110 cots for rent. We have a Woman's Dormitory, Preachers' Cottage (Woodbine), Woman's Missionary Society building, Woman's Christian Temperance Union building. A deep well and oil engine provide water supply. Stock, to the extent of $1,200, has been sold for a water system. Only acknowledged debt is $450 on woman's building. Epworth League conference is called the "best yet." Incorporation is ordered and trustees named: R. L. Russell, H. P. Crowe, N. B. Henry, Clarence Burton, W. H. Stubblefield, L. D. Baker, C. M. Hay, B. P. Burnham. Thus endeth a decade. Some observations are in order.

As to the superintendency and the planning and directing of the program. Very early the Arcadia pastor and the Farmington District Presiding Elder are named a board of control. Then we have reference to the presiding elders of the conference as a committee on program. Then the chairmen of the participating conference boards are named as in charge of their respective programs. The pastors of Arcadia were Revs. L. F. Aspley, A. S. Coker, John T. Self, one year each; Rev. J. R. A. Vaughan two years, Rev. N. B. Henry four years and he seems to have continued in some authority after going to Bismarck as pastor. At the end of the decade Rev. A. S. J. Baldridge was field secretary for the Sunday School Board and began to give direction to the Assembly. Very early – perhaps at the very beginning – Mr. P. A. Price of Poplar Bluff, a traveling salesman, began to give summer vacation time to serving in charge of the office, and is mentioned in an Annual report as administrative superintendent. It is believed that he gave twelve years of service. Rev. R. P. Basler also appears as holding some administrative office, and especially with regard to the dining room.

III

The second decade of our Assembly takes off with an optimistic note of continuous improvements. The summer session receipts are $2,250, with expenses $1,930. Needs are listed: hotels, lecture rooms, water works. The General Sunday School Board was asked to locate at Arcadia and proposed great Assembly, something like Lake Junaluska, for the area west of the Mississippi River. The Institution was located at Fayetteville, Arkansas, on a community offer of $100,000, and is known as Western Methodist Assembly or Mt. Sequoyah.

1920. The reports for the Conference Journal become more explicit in revealing what the summer programs include: Preachers' Institute, Epworth League Conferences, School of Methods for Sunday School workers, Woman's Missionary Conference, Woman's Christian Temperance Union Convention. The 1921 Journal reports "a successful year, ...our people may form the habit of an Arcadia summer vacation." No financial report.

For the first time trustees are named in the Conference Journal Directory in 1922, and they are: R. P. Basler, P. A. Price, O. H. Duggins, Louis Miller, W. H. Stubblefield. R. L. Russell, Clarence Burton. A detailed financial report is provided,

showing expenditures of $3,296 – and only $36 left. Water, sanitary shower bath system installed and two houses under construction. Leaguers subscribed $2,000 for a swimming pool. (What became of that?) Evidently Oliver H. Duggins had become superintendent, for the 1923 report indicates he was reimbursed $65 for the Assembly's electric power bill he paid the year before – and that sounds like a superintendent! The water tower cost $2,500 in 1922 and a ten year lease was taken on the Miller Spring and renewed ten years later. Like Israel trekking through the desert toward the homeland, the Assembly would have a water-scarcity problem for a long, long time.

1924. Income of $4,000, including $1,300 from conference boards and revived sale of lots for $512. Property is valued at $50,000. Epworth Leaguers have built a "creditable building" on a lot granted them five years before. Listed for accommodation are dormitories, bungalettes, tents, dining room, bath house. Registered for Epworth League Week, 240. Mrs. W. F. Talley is in a long-time term of service as manager of the dining room.

1925. Receipts are $4,430 and the grounds will be open from June 1 to Sept. 1.

1926. Receipts are up to $7,574 and the debt for the water system paid in full. Superintendent Duggins had raised $1,556 in this campaign. Here is a brother who should, even at this late date, have some building named in his honor, or otherwise be placed in a perpetual remembrance, for his resolute devotion and untiring effort carried the Assembly through most critical times; and he did not even take his meals at the dining hall as compensation for his work. It was truly a labor of love.

1927. Finances up near $8,000. Conference recommends study of Assembly constitution and election of trustees as provided by the same. Note is made of the tragic death of Rev. C. C. Fesler by drowning while trying to rescue drowning young people in Lake Killarney, with a recommendation that a building be named in his honor. (It was not. Alas for our resolutions! He was granted posthumously a Carnegie medal, and his dependent survivors a Carnegie pension.)

1928. Beginning with this year, we have minutes of the trustees' meetings. Trustees, set up in classes of three years, begin to be published in the Conference Journal. Articles of Incorporation also published in the Conference Journal. Trustees: H.C. Hoy, R. G. Applegate, W. A. Ruggles, C. P. Thogmorton, H. Sam Jones, Walker

Ames, C. W. Webdell, O. H. Duggins Thomas Mellow. The Epworth League Conferences were attended by 375

There were giants in those days as speakers: Bishop McConnell, Forney Hutchinson, Andrew Sledd, Umphrey Lee, Paul B. Kern and others equally distinguished. During this decade Marvin College was discontinued, and, in desperate search of ways to save it, there was considerable talk of selling Arcadia Assembly and using the money for the salvation of the college. This, however, never came up for any official decision. Actually, while the college was dying the Assembly was slowly gathering strength.

If we have sometimes felt that we have vacation church schools forever, it is a surprising recovery of the facts that one summer Assembly had the novelty – and novelty it was to a great many – a demonstration vacation Bible school conducted by F. C. Reiner, a Presbyterian minister, and the writer. It was the first such recognition of that sort of summer venture in religious education within the bounds of our conference.

IV

The pastor of Piedmont-Arcadia, C. R. Baker, was elected superintendent in 1929. A skillful carpenter, Bro. Baker did valuable work in repair and building. This was about the time that several small cottages were built with walls of pine lumber slabs – picturesque but perishable. Sunday School Week was changed to Church Week. Late in the year C. P. Thogmorton, presiding elder of the Farmington District, was elected superintendent without salary.

1930. New electric wiring cost $362. Receipts were $8, 525. The League building is described as having eighteen rooms, ten foot wide porch across the entire front, modern baths, $6,500 value with debt of only $345. Total Leaguers in attendance 266. Last "Epworth League" report to be submitted, since this is to be taken over by the Board of Education

The depression was hurting. Receipts in 1931 were down by at least 30%. A three weeks program was authorized but effort must be made to cut expenses, says the report. Rev. J. H. Jones was employed as officer to maintain discipline in the camps, a position he held several years. A board member was authorized to ask the annual

conference for $2,500 financial support, but reported back to the Board that he found himself afraid to present the request!

1932. We owe Bank of Arcadia a note for $1,600 and it is not being reduced. Refreshment stand operated at a loss of $25, and net profits were only $40. Auditor states that he does not know what are the unpaid bills. Board of Education vetoed a plan for a pastors' school.

1933. No trustees report to Annual Conference, but the Board of Education says "no lack of enthusiasm and interest". The Bank of Arcadia is now referred to as "the closed Bank of Arcadia," and still holds that note of ours for $1,600. The St. Louis Christian Endeavor is granted permission to use our facilities. But the trustees put our own Methodist Young People under heavy responsibility: "The Young People's Conference hereby guarantees the Assembly against any financial loss, and will clean and prepare the grounds for the Assembly." The Trustees had most seriously considered the closing of the Assembly. Once closed, it is most doubtful it would have ever been reopened. Honor to whom honor is due: in the depth of the depression the Young People saved the Assembly to the Church.

1934. This is the half-way year, and the young people held their Silver Anniversary with your writer as the dean. This was also the year your writer began 21 years of service as trustee. The Board appointed a committee to consider the possibility of building a swimming pool in the hope that some government agency would help finance the enterprise.

1935. Early in the year, at a "spur of the moment" called meeting of the Board, the construction of the swimming pool was authorized. It is evident that the estimated cost of the pool is $3,000 – final figures $5,829. This was the year the Board of Education was under the financial necessity of discontinuing the services of a salaried Executive Secretary. A layman's retreat was recommended.

1936. H. H. Brower, chairman of the board, and A. C. Johnson, newly elected superintendent, are given the responsibility of administration. The Layman's Week-end retreat brought in $416. The 4-H clubs use our camp. Total receipts are up to $9,000. Unpaid bills reduced from $2,115 to $1,600. There was a generous gift from the Woman's Missionary Society. Refinancing is authorized, along with an effort to get a loan of $6,500.

1937. Obligations are $5,960, plus two years unpaid taxes.

1938. Commendation given the services of A. C. Johnson as superintendent. Hugh O. Isbell, presiding elder Farmington District, elected superintendent. Harry J. Davis begins a 21 year service as trustee and secretary of the Board – and he is still in the service. We still owed nearly $6,000. Water was blamed for illness among young people and prompt efforts made, hampered by poverty, but with some success, to purify the water supply.

V

1939. No report in Conference Journal. Floyd V. Brower becomes superintendent.

1940. A general improvement is shown. A unified church gives better support and the country's economy is going into high gear. Country and Church are facing another war. Debt of Assembly is reduced to $4,700, and all old accounts were paid. There were 1,269 campers for 5,240 days.

1941. Debt is refinanced so to pay $56 monthly on combined principal and interest charges; receipts are nearly $9,000: the Assembly breathes easily for the first time in a long time. Duggins and Holliman cottages bought and negotiations under way to buy Russell Cottage.

1942. Receipts up to $10,494. Stewart cottage bought.

1943. Out of debt! Layman's retreat recommended.

1944. Rev. Joe H. Wagner superintendent. Despite war conditions, attendance was 2,200. Assembly showed a surplus of $1,250. Employment of year-round caretaker recommended. 1945. S. J. Kimbell, superintendent. Enrollment 2,348, and more than $4,000 for improvements. A strange note in trustees minutes: Intoxicants prohibited. Some non-Methodist groups had been using the grounds.

1946. H. E. Grayum, Arcadia Valley school administrator, elected superintendent and a fine service he gave us. Woman's Society of Christian Service gave $1,150 for kitchen. Total income $18,500, and net profit $8,200. Swimming pool expense $836. Attendance down to 1,985, including 1,131 Methodists.

1947. Seven weeks of large attendance: 2,300 including 1,346 Methodists. In attendance: Southeast Missouri Christian Young People, 4-H clubs, Walther League, St.

Louis-Potosi Presbyterian youths. Color line was cracked in permission to have resource persons of other races attend. "Much needed improvements being made," and have a balance of $13,145 for additional improvements.

1948. High cost of living gives smaller profit. Still have balance of $13,152 for improvements. Dr. Matt Ellis was speaker for Layman's Retreat.

This decade concluded forty years, and like Israel's forty years of journeying, the Assembly was within sight of the Promised Land.

VI

1949. H. E. Grayum continued as superintendent during the summer season. In the board meeting at the time of the annual conference Rev. R. F. LeGrand was elected superintendent, the first to live on the Assembly grounds and give full time service. This was a significant forward step. The layman's retreat offering was $705 and was devoted to the improvement of Vesper Hill.

1950. Nine assemblies. Doubled attendance at layman's retreat. Note: this layman's retreat has become a spiritually vitalizing event for the manhood of our conference and the event generating the largest support for the Assembly. There were many improvements in terracings, walks, painting, etc.

1951. The laymen pay for a black-top floor for the tabernacle. J. Clinton Hawkins becomes chairman of the trustees, a significant election. Ten summer assemblies. Total receipts $22,783. The Edgar house is to be bought, and an adequate sewage disposal system authorized.

1952. Purchased nine lots from individual owners, and two additional buildings. (Now 34 buildings.) During youth meetings there were 61 volunteers for full time Christian service, including 18 for the ministry of preaching. Three non-Methodist groups accommodated. Men's attendance increased by 296. Operating profits were $4,638.

1953. Completion of sewage disposal at cost of $5,536, exclusive of $1,000 worth of work by Mr. Powell. Methodist Men paid $1,000 for new pews for the tabernacle and will resurface the swimming pool. Cape District youth give $1,000 for drinking fountains. Enrollment increase 324.

1954. For improvements $9,000. Woman's Society of Christian Service is again helping furnish the kitchen. Layman's Retreat offering over $1,200. Total expenditures $34,598. Festus and Desloge Methodist Men making large contributions. Permission granted Central Jurisdiction Methodist youths to use the Assembly. (They have not.)

1955. Total receipts $48,238. Layman's Retreat offering $1,600. Woman's Society of Christian Service, Wesleyan Service Guilds, local churches' Methodist Men all making fine gifts: and $1,000 from St. Louis MYF. A new cottage, four rooms and bath. New electric wiring at cost $1,450. Moving for written contract for water with Arcadia.

1956. This was "the short year," with no assemblies before annual conference, but the report notes $5,000 in improvements. Filter provided for swim pool. Conference grants of support of $1,500 per year, and this is increased by missions gifts. Winterizing of buildings authorized.

1957. Enrollment just short of 2,500, Methodist Men 671. Receipts $47,121, with gifts from 126 churches in campaign promoted by Methodist Men.

1958. For improvements $19,530, with receipts of over $50,000. New water lines required and provided. Bookkeeping service authorized. Half-century observance ordered. THUS ENDETH A HALF-CENTURY OF SURVIVAL AND SERVICE.

The very survival of the Assembly has been one of the miracles of the half-century. At least three Missouri Methodist colleges died while it lived on. We have come through the Mexican Border expedition, Word Wars One and Two, the Korean "Police Action." Panics and depressions have followed booms of prosperity. Prohibition was adopted, dishonored, repealed. Methodism prayed its way into unification, healing long decades of disgraceful division. World Methodism came into a working fellowship. The World Council of Churches has been created, even as there is the United Nations for the counsels of the nations....I have sat in the Assembly morning worship with a man who had come, in a mule-drawn buggy, all the way from Fredericktown in a Sabbath Day's journey and who would make the return drive in the afternoon. Times have changed.

Arcadia is one of the very few Methodist Assemblies half-century old, and perhaps the only one west of the Mississippi River.

Bro. Duggins, presiding elder, was the minister who gave me the bread and the cup of the first Communion of my boyhood. Many years later I taught his son, Hillis, to swim, while we were at Arcadia. Hillis became an Episcopal priest, friend to thousands of bewildered Americans in Europe as he served as rector of the great American Churches in Paris and Rome. He was translated in early death. When my heart mourned, my heart also remembered the long hikes and wholesome fellowship of those Arcadia days. I went to serve the Jefferson City District as super-intendent, and discovered that one of my strongest colleagues-in-the-ministry had surrendered to God's commission to preach as he listened to a sermon of mine in a Pilot Knob sunrise service during an Arcadia Assembly. What a place Arcadia has been for casting bread upon the waters and sowing the seeds of kindness and the Gospel!

Through days of preparation God's grace has made Arcadia strong – for the next half-century.

Editor's Note: *Many, many of us found fellowship, fun, and spiritual growth at Arcadia. Your editor remembers with great joy the weeks he spent at senior high camps there during the 1950s. Thanks to leaders such as Marvin Fortel, Kenneth Johnston, Howard Hardeman, Barbara Eskew, Jane Howard, Val Strader, I became more of a Christian and started on the path that led to full---time ministry. It was during a sub-district MYF meeting that I accepted God's call to ministry because of a statement that was made by J. C. Montgomery, the presiding elder of the district.*

I also remember how senior high camps impacted the young adults in the Wellsville Methodist Church. They became fascinated by the folk dances that we enjoyed at Arcadia. They bought the complete set of World of Fun records and, every summer, could hardly wait until we returned from camp so we could teach them the steps to new dances we had learned that year.

I'm sure that many of you had great experiences at Arcadia as well. Perhaps for you it was a Methodist Men's Retreat, or some other function. If you have memories and stories you'd like to share, please send them to me and they'll be included in a future issue of this journal. My email address is jogooch@aol.com. My "snail mail" address is 510 NW Murray Rd, Apt. 310, Lees Summit, MO, 64081. I look forward to hearing from you.

WHAT I LEARNED FROM THE "OLD-TIME RELIGION"

John O. Gooch

Last Sunday in worship, our organist played "Gimme that old time religion" for the offertory music. He played it in classical style, with lots of ruffles and flourishes, but for those of us who knew the tune, it was unmistakably that song. I got the words stuck in my mind, and then I started thinking about what I had actually learned from the old-time religion. But, first, Full Disclosure #1: this is not a scholarly article; it is a love song to the church of my childhood and youth. Full Disclosure #2: For me the old-time religion was not the camp meeting, revival, come-to-the-altar kind of religion. It was the religion that was preached and lived out in a Methodist church in a small town in east-central Missouri in the 1940s and 50s. Not necessarily the "old-time religion" we think about. Not a lot of emotion, no "sawdust trails," no great revivals. But that "old-time religion" shaped a lot of lives and won a lot of people to faith in Jesus Christ and loyalty to the Methodist (as it was then) Church. So what did I learn?

Children and Youth are Important

We didn't have children's time in worship, but there was no doubt in any of our minds, even at a very young age (though we could not have articulated it then) that children were important. The children's Sunday School was the center of the education program. We had the most room, the best room, teachers who really cared about us and teaching us about the Bible and our relationship with God. I'll always be grateful to Mrs. Whitesell, Mrs. Cannon, my mother, and other leaders in that Sunday School. In addition, we had two weeks of Vacation Bible School every summer, with the same kind of commitment from the adult leaders. As we grew up, we were given every opportunity to participate in the life of the church. The congregation sent whoever wanted to go to youth camp every summer. The experiences at Arcadia (see the previous article) were life-forming and life-changing. We had consistent leadership for the MYF. Mrs. Zimman was always there for us. She had us in her home regularly. She taught us how to pray. She directed us in the plays we put on for fund-raisers. Other adults in the church saw that we had transportation to out-of-town meetings for sub-district and district MYF meetings. The pastor had a practice of using youth ushers in worship.

And Mrs. Dieter, who was the editor of the local paper and the church lay leader, would always say to us whenever we did anything in church, "you done good, but I knowed you would." (Except for that one saying she always used impeccable English.) Both members of the congregation and my boss in the local grocery store (who was not a church-goer) made it possible for me to attend the National Youth Convocation at Purdue University, and the regional convocation at Mt. Sequoyah in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Out of that experience of my childhood and youth, ministries for those age groups always were a high priority for me. I was always involved with the youth in every church I served, and, later in life I spent eight years as a member of the denominational youth ministry staff, developing study resources (including two generations of confirmation resources) and leading workshops for adult leaders with youth. I "paid back" the old-time religion by helping with the planning and/or leading of 5 national youth convocations, as well as teaching Senior High Sunday School for nearly 10 years.

God is a God of Love

We lived into a theology that said God is a God of love. We learned it from the way people talked to us, took care of us, considered us important. The most important Bible verse in our entire Sunday School experience was John 3:16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The song that we knew for certain we'd sing most Sundays was "Jesus Loves Me." Years later, a member of one of my congregations said to me, "John, the one thing we know for sure from all your ministry is that God loves us." That statement was the fruits of the seeds that had been planted years before in that little church in that small town. I now have a more sophisticated theological understanding of what God's love means, but the basis of all my theology is that God is a God of love. When Karl Barth, one of the great theologians of the 20th century, was asked what was the most important thing about the Christian faith, he responded, "Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong. They are weak but he is strong." God loves us. We are called to love one another. We are called

to love our enemies. We are called to put "work clothes" on our love of God and neighbor and help to change the world into the Kingdom of God.

Scripture is the Bedrock of the Faith

More than anything else in those years, we learned the Bible. Even in the Pre-school Sunday School, we learned Bible stories. By the time I was in first grade, I knew most of the Bible stories that really mattered, from Adam and Eve to Jesus, and in between. In Primary Sunday School, we memorized Bible verses, we learned the order of the books of the Bible, we learned more about the stories of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Solomon, Jesus, Peter, Paul, and so on. From all that we learned intuitively that Scripture was important. Long before I ever heard of the Quadrilateral or the Primacy of Scripture, I knew that Scripture was the most important foundation for the faith. When we were about 5th and 6th grade, my mother and Mrs. Dieter somehow felt we needed a "junior MYF". Part of that was because their sons (including me) were in those grades. But it was also a project to help 5th and 6th graders in the church to learn more about the Bible. I remember contests (usually between boys and girls, because that was the way we did contests in those days) about who could recite the books of the Old Testament and the New Testament in order. There was always a mixup about Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah – well, you get the picture. We also spent a lot of time talking about what the Bible meant. And the adults allowed us to ask questions and be skeptical. Our pastor, J.C. McDaniel, could stand in the pulpit and quote Scripture by the yard! He always included the book, chapter, and verse, for every Scripture he quoted. I remember thinking that was so cool, and I wanted to be able to do the same thing. I now suspect that he had some notes up there in the pulpit to remind him of those verses, but it was impressive to a child!

Somehow, we also learned that "proof-texting" was not the way to use the Scripture. By that, I mean that we learned not to quote Bible verses out of context to try to win an argument. We learned to think critically about the Scripture, by example. When I was a junior in high school, our Charge Conference recommended me for a license to preach. I had to do a series of essays by correspondence about Scripture topics (the parables and miracles of Jesus, as I recall). Our pastor gave me access to his

commentaries and I discovered a whole new world of understanding. I could still love the Scripture and be intellectually honest about it as well. What a gift!

Today, United Methodists seem bent on using one or two verses of Scripture in order to win arguments with other United Methodists. I have heard leading clergy from across the denomination do this, quoting one verse to prove that something they disagree with is not allowed, but ignoring the next verse which says that something with which they agree is not allowed. That is neither thinking critically about the Scripture, nor loving the Scripture. For all its weaknesses when it came to the critical use of Scripture, the old time religion took the Bible seriously!

Life Has a Goal – Heaven

We don't talk much about heaven these days, but then we did. It was not a complicated theology. We just knew that "heaven was our home" and the goal of life was to live so as to make it to heaven. Most of that theology came from the hymns we sang, such as these words from "Holy, Holy, Holy:" "Holy, holy, holy, all the saints adore thee, casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea…." There were other hymns as well, whose theology was not quite as good, but whose piety was flawless. "Beulah Land." "O That Will be Glory For Me." "When They Ring Those Golden Bells For You and Me." "Sweet By and By." I loved those hymns and still love to sing them. At a deeper level, both of my grandmothers died when I was just a boy. One died when I was 9 and the other when I was 10. For years, my faith was built on the assurance that I'd be reunited with them in heaven. That may sound naïve, but it was certainly a means of assurance for a small boy – and for a teenager and young adult. As an adult theologian, I translated some of that piety into Wesleyan understandings of holiness and Christian perfection. But the basic foundation was something I learned from the old-time religion of my childhood. Life on this earth is important, but heaven is my home.

There is Comfort – and Power -- in the Liturgy

Not that we had a high-church liturgy. But we followed the Order of Worship that was printed in the Hymnal, and we knew it would be the same every Sunday. There was comfort in knowing that. We'd begin with a hymn, then a responsive reading (more

Scripture), then we'd sing the Gloria Patri, and recite the Apostles' Creed. Again, there was solid theology, a statement of faith that connected us with the long tradition of the church, as well as helping us express our own belief. The Prayer of Confession was not a part of the liturgy, except on Communion Sunday, when we followed the ritual for Communion word for word. But the pastor always had words of confession and pardon in the pastoral prayer. Even as a child – and more so as a youth – I found comfort and power in the familiar words we said every week. Somehow, so-called "contemporary worship" doesn't carry the same comfort and power for me.

We Sing Our Faith

The Wesleyan movement has always been known for being a "singing church." John Wesley once famously said something to the effect of, "so long as the Methodists sing the hymns of Charles and of Isaac Watts, they will always have a sound theology, no matter how poor the preaching may be." And so it was for our church. We sang our theology (though we also had good preaching). I've already shared an example of that with "Holy, Holy, Holy." But we also sang "Amazing Grace," "O For A Thousand Tongues to Sing," "Come, Thou Almighty King," "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord," and the list could go on and on. My favorite, even at a young age, was "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling." We used the Cokesbury hymnal in Sunday School and Sunday evening worship, and the Methodist Hymnal (1937 edition) in Sunday morning worship. No worship service was ever complete without the singing of at least three hymns – and all the verses of those hymns!

We also sang our piety, which was related to our theology, but on a different level. Hymns of piety also carried theology, but they were more important to us as expressions of our personal faith and relationship to God through Jesus Christ. We probably could not have stated a theology of assurance or holy living, or even justification. But we could sing them. We didn't go around talking about giving our lives to the Lord, but we believed we had done so – and could quite comfortably sing about it. Hymns such as "He Leadeth Me," "Take the Name of Jesus With You," "Are Ye Able," "Jesus Calls Us," "I Need Thee Every Hour," "Help Somebody Today," and many, many others expressed our faith. Perhaps my favorite hymn in the piety singing was "If I Have Wounded Any Soul Today." We sang it often in Sunday evening services. It

served as a generic kind of prayer of confession, but also reminded us that God was a God of love, who forgave God's children.

We did not follow Wesley's guide of singing only Wesley and Watts hymns, but we were sincere in both our theology and our piety. I still, as a retired pastor, gain strength and meaning from the hymns and tend to be more critical of the choice of hymns for worship than I am of the preaching. That probably stems from my childhood and youth, when hymn singing was such an important part of my faith development. The key to this lesson I learned from the old-time religion is that the content of the hymn is important. We need to sing our faith, because the words of the hymn reinforce that faith every time we sing it. I don't remember much of anything specific that was said in preaching in those days, but I can still sing the hymns without ever looking at the hymnbook!

We Are a Connectional Church

I first became aware of the connectional nature of Methodism when I was a freshman in high school. The conference moved the pastor I had known all through childhood and sent us a new, younger pastor, the Rev. Harold Spickelmeier. At about the same time, many of the churches in our county and on the edges of two adjoining counties, had new pastors. These young men got together and organized what they called a Group Ministry. This was a pooling of gifts and graces for leadership on their part, and a growing awareness of the connectional nature of the church for the laity. I remember we had a gathering of all the churches in this Group Ministry one Sunday night a month. Since this was a Methodist thing, the evening began with a potluck supper. Then there was a time of worship, or a program pertaining to issues of the day, or sometimes a hymn-sing.

When I responded to the call to ministry, I became aware of the connectional system on yet another level. There was a special called Charge Conference to vote to approve me for a License to Preach, and then an interview with the District Committee on Ministry to gain their approval. I learned that the Methodist Church (as it still was then) was serious about the commitment and training of persons who were going to become leaders in the church.

At about the same time, the leadership in our Group Ministry decided to have a simultaneous revival in every church at the same time. Since all the charges had at least two churches, that meant there were not enough clergy to handle that load, and lay people were going to fill many of the pulpits. Mrs. Dieter and I were chosen from my church to preach. Each of the clergy were in a different church every night, and the lay persons who were preaching were also. I believe I preached in three different small churches that week. The Saturday before Dad and I drove to a couple of them that we weren't sure where they were, so I'd know where I was headed. I confess that the one I liked best was the church where my girlfriend's father was the pastor. She got to hear me preach and I got to hear her sing!

But the strongest awareness of the connectional system came with the awareness that Rev. Spickelmeier was ill. I'm not sure what the problem was, but it was clear even to a high school sophomore that he was not going to be able to continue in ministry. One fall night the phone rang as we were eating dinner. It was Bishop Holt, calling from the meeting of the annual conference to tell Dad (who must have been chairman of the board that year) that he was sending us another preacher in place of Rev. Spickelmeier. Dad said, "no, you're not." The Bishop said, "But, man, he's sick. He'll never be in the pulpit again. I have to think about the church." Dad said, "You send Harold back to us and let us worry about the church. We'll be fine." The Bishop said, "I have to send another preacher." I remember clearly hearing my Dad say, "you can send whoever you want, but the only preacher whose salary we'll pay is Harold Spickelmeier." I also remember clearly wondering when the lightning would hit, since I thought the Bishop was just one rank below God. That was the first example of consultation I ever heard, and the local church got what it wanted. Rev. Spickelmeier was re-appointed to Wellsville-Middletown, and, just as the Bishop said, he never preached again. The District Superintendent, Rev. J.C. Montgomery, Sr., preached every Sunday in a different church in the district and sent the pastor of that church to preach in our churches. This was true of the pastors in the big churches, such as St. Charles First and Jefferson City First, as well as the smallest church in the district. To me, at the time and in retrospect, that was the finest example of the connection and the covenant community among the clergy that I have ever seen, or ever expect to see. Rev. Spickelmeier died in February, and the pastors kept coming until seminary graduation

in May, when we received a brand-new preacher, Rev. Bob Windsor, a graduate of Vanderbilt.

Evangelism is Crucial

This is a lesson I learned the year that Rev. Spickelmeier was sick and, eventually, died. The Wellsville church organized a "Fisherman's Club," a group of laity who met once a month and went out to call on inactive church members and people in the community who were not members of any church. In a small town there were not a lot of people moving in, so the unchurched people were well known to the leaders of our congregation. But, even with our pastor dying, we had 24 new members on profession of faith that year! And church attendance went up. There were several of us youth who were part of the Fisherman's Club, and we went out to call on other youth. This was the period when television sets were becoming a fixture in homes. We could get three channels, all black-and-white, but they were watched regularly. I remember one evening when the two of us who were working that evening, managed to catch most of our favorite show (starring Phil Silvers as Sgt. Bilko) while we were talking to other youth about coming to church! Oh, and it worked. Our MYF group grew to 14, with an average attendance of 14. We did everything together and grew in faith even as we had fun.

One example of how important evangelism can be. We had a guy who did not go to any church that we really wanted to get involved. We tried to get him to come to MYF as a starter. Since we had had some training in how to do this, two of us told him we'd come by and pick up him up to go to MYF. Well, he wasn't ready. He didn't want to go. So we said we'd come back the next week. Still no. This went on for weeks. Finally, on the 13th week, he gave in and came to MYF. After that, he was in worship, Sunday School, choir, MYF. As an adult he has been his church's lay leader for many years. And all because we went by 13 straight weeks to pick him up for MYF. The old-time religion understood that there was more to evangelism than revival meetings, however important those might be. It understood that people come to church, come to relationship with Jesus Christ, because they are asked. And, many times, asked again and again and again.

Justice Is An Expression of Faith

I recently saw a poster on Facebook that said, "Justice is Love in work clothes." In our little town, justice came to the forefront of everyone's attention when the Supreme Court handed down a ruling in *Brown vs. Board of Education* that mandated integration of the public schools. Previously, our schools had been segregated and there was all kind of uproar about the fact that black children would be going to school with white children. By coincidence, my Dad was President of the School Board that year. I worked in a mom-and-pop grocery store that summer and Dad picked me up at 6 when the store closed. Almost every night, when I came out of the store, Dad was engaged in conversation with someone who was upset about the integration of the schools. So I stayed and listened to the conversation. I assume that Dad had his share of the prejudice that was common in that day, but it never showed. He calmly said to all those upset folks, over and over, that integration was now the law of the land. We were going to obey that law and it was going to work. He and others had been in conversation with the leaders of the African-American community and there was co-operation on both sides of the racial divide, determined that there would be no problems.

I learned a lot that summer. What Dad was talking about was justice. Since then, I've come to understand that the biblical notion of justice is standing by those who are marginalized, oppressed, or otherwise out of the social and economic mainstream. I believe that. I saw it at work when I was in high school, night after night, listening to my Dad talk to people who couldn't believe that there was anything good about integrating the public schools. That example of faith led me to work for civil rights and voting rights as a young pastor in the 1960s. It led me to work for civil rights, including the right to marry, for gay and lesbian couples in today's world. I learned that from the old-time religion I saw practiced on the streets of my hometown.

We Are Called to Bring Good News to the World

John Wesley said, "The world is my parish." He didn't mean exactly what we take that to mean today, as a mandate for missionary ventures, but he probably would not have disagreed with what we mean, either. We knew about world missions. From time to time, we had missionaries visit our church. These were God's faithful servants teaching, preaching, or other forms of ministry in foreign countries. They would come

back to the States for a year on furlough – and spend a good bit of that time itinerating among churches to share the story of their ministry. So we had some sense of the larger church ministry. When Rev. Spickelmeier died, we all wanted to do something for a memorial. We knew that he had a strong interest in missions in India, so that was a place to start thinking. Somehow, our youth group found out that it was possible to build a mission station in India for $2,500. Obviously, we could not raise that kind of money. Remember this was in the early 1950s. But we learned we could build a parsonage for $250. We decided to make that our memorial and challenged the churches in the Group Ministry to come up with the other $2000. We put on a play for the public as a fund-raiser. We had work days where we went out and did work for people in the church and community in return for a sum which they had pledged. In less than a year we had our $250, and the churches in the area had raised the other $2,000. I've always had a warm spot in my heart for the church in India because of that project. But I've always also remembered the world-wide mission of bringing the word of Christ to all peoples and places.

The Christian Life is About Discipline

Not the Book of Discipline. That's another matter. This is the discipline of life, where Christians "dig in" and discipline themselves in such a way that their life together in the church helps persons grow in faith and understanding. I learned this first from my parents. They both taught Sunday School. Mother taught children, Dad taught youth (for a year or two) and then the young adult class. I can remember seeing Dad get up a half-hour earlier every morning, so he could get the cow milked and the morning chores done, and still have time to work on his Sunday School lesson before he left for his job in town. I remember Mother stopping all the other things that needed to be done, in order to be sure that everything she needed for her Sunday School class, or Vacation Bible School, was in order. I learned this from Mrs. Updyke, who thought it was important that she knew all the notes and tempos of the hymns – and therefore practiced them. She thought it was important that the choir know the hymns, as well as the anthem for any given Sunday. So we practiced. Members of the congregation gave up time and talent for board meetings, for work projects, for prayer vigils. They took seriously the need to be in touch with God through prayer and private devotion. The

"old-time religion" taught us all that we needed to be good steward of our time and talents and that we were prepared to use them wisely.

That's what I learned from the old-time religion. There were still other lessons to be learned, of course. In fact, I'm still discovering new ones. But what I learned from the old-time religion as a child and youth is the bedrock on which I built my faith , my life, and my ministry.